

### *Ranching (1850-1934)*

SCI came under the authority of the U.S. government after the Treaty of Hidalgo ended the Mexican American War in 1848. SCI was used legally and illegally for sheep ranching from 1850 until 1934 when the DoN gained control of the Island.

Sheep ranching was first started in California by the Spanish missionaries, to supply both food and fiber. The Island was a particularly profitable place for grazing for a number of reasons: 1) it was free from predators such as coyotes and bears; 2) no fencing and little management was required; 3) there was ample pasture for sheep; 4) there was minimal or no cost to lease the land; and 5) the shipping of sheep and wool by sea was cheaper than by land.

Several theories abound as to how sheep and goats first arrived on the Island. Some authors suggest Franciscans may have originally brought sheep over to the island to teach the Native Americans farming and ranching techniques in the late 1700s. Others suggest that Spanish sailing ships and/or sea otter smugglers may also have left sheep behind for future food stocks. Whatever the case, sheep are well documented starting about 1850, and goats around the mid-1800s, but they could have been there earlier.

Numerous people illegally ranched on SCI and built structures, roads, fences, wells, and dams throughout the mid-1800s. During this period there were often violent struggles among the squatters. In 1881, the SCI Wool Company bought out its opposition and gained sole control over grazing rights (Andrew 1998). However, in 1891, the Department of the Interior (DoI) declared the entire Island reserved for lighthouse purposes. All persons and companies were ordered to leave. The Wool Company stayed and eventually obtained an official lease to use the Island. In 1900, the Wool Company was granted, with much controversy, a "revocable license for the period of five years at a rental of \$1,000 per year." It was suggested that the Wool Company was awarded sole grazing rights to reduce the number of people on the island, thus making it easier to remove them in the future (Andrew 1998). Estimates of the number of sheep present on the island throughout the late-1800s range from 8,000 to 40,000. In addition, up to 1,000 head of cattle were also grazed on the island during this time (Photo 3-1).

Lack of fresh water eventually caught up with the ranchers and, in 1903 and 1904, the company lost 4,000 sheep from drought. In 1906, the Wool Company was given a new five-year lease and was required to develop new water structures. An 88-foot dam was built somewhere near the middle of the Island (the exact location is unknown), and a new wagon road was built from Wilson Cove to Middle Ranch. At this time, the government sent an inspector to the Island who concluded that the Island contained 16,000 acres of grazable land. Controversy surrounded this number and indicators of overgrazing were not taken seriously enough (Andrew 1998). In 1909, the Wool Company was granted a new 25-year lease and invested in reseeding certain areas with non-indigenous annuals.

A major epidemic of sheep scab affected the California sheep industry and in 1929 the Island was quarantined until steps were taken to eradicate the disease. Dipping troughs and much new fencing were consequently constructed to isolate herds from one another. The disease was eventually eradicated by 1933.



Photo 3-1. Circa 1896 USGS photograph showing free-ranging cattle (upper left of photo) on "front edge of 480-foot terrace about 2.5 miles southeast of Seal Harbor, San Clemente Island, looking southeast" (Smith 1896).

New bids for leasing SCI were taken in 1934. Out of concern for overgrazing, limits were placed on the number of sheep that would be allowed to graze: 2,500 during the first year and no more than 8,000 on any subsequent year. However, an aerial reconnaissance of the Channel Islands performed by the Navy in 1932 determined that SCI made a good location for an emergency landing field and all ranching bids were rejected. The Island was transferred to the DoN on November 7, 1934 by an EO of the President. The Wool Company received a six-month extension during which they were ordered to remove all livestock. However, many goats, which had been used to herd the sheep, were abandoned and would eventually cause much disturbance on the Island. Interestingly, the goats were originally used for herding because of a California law which prohibited the use of dogs for herding sheep (Andrew 1998). Goats were sometimes hunted for sport by visitors in the early 1900s (Holder 1910). Because of their negative impact on the Island's ecosystem (Section 3.3.6.3), goats were eventually removed by the Navy.



Photo 3-2. Goats on San Clemente Island in the 1980s.

#### *Use of Marine Resources*

SCI has been a popular sport and commercial fishing destination for many decades. A variety of fishes have been taken by commercial fishermen and sold in Los Angeles. The north side of the Island was recognized as the best fishing area. The extreme east end and Mosquito Cove were also particularly rewarding to fishermen. The large game fishes avoid the surf and sandy beaches.

The Chinese established camps in the early 1850's and harvested abalone to supply San Francisco's Chinatown customers. Lobster fisherman also established camps on SCI. Boats would come out from San Diego once a week with supplies and take the lobsters back. SCI was also used by smugglers of Chinese workers and alcohol (Flynn 1942).

#### *Early Military Use (1934-1984)*

Early on, SCI was found to be ideally suited for Naval missions because: 1) its remoteness permits classified projects to be developed with adequate security; 2) its clear water, variety of depths, and bottom conditions around the island are perfect for testing sonar equipment, new weapons, and safety devices; and 3) there is adequate land area for separation of test ranges for different types of use (EIS for Utilization Plan 1974). Soon after SCI came under Navy control, many new facilities were developed, especially in Wilson Cove. Throughout the next four decades, the number of personnel on SCI would fluctuate, but the importance of the Island for training exercises and the development of new weapons systems would gradually increase (Table 3-1)